

# Black River Audubon Society

# WINGTIPS

April 2008



John Koscinski

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Photographer: John Koscinski

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## Program

*Due to a scheduling change at ODNR Division of Wildlife, our program is different than that previously announced. Thanks, Keith, for filling the breach.*

### **The Color of Quality:**

#### **Why are Goldfinches So Flamboyant?**

**Keith Tarvin**, Associate Professor of Biology  
Oberlin College

Tuesday, April 1, 7 PM

Carlisle Visitor's Center

**Keith** will discuss research that he and his students are conducting at Carlisle Reservation on the role of plumage and bill color in the reproductive life of American Goldfinches.

### **Young Birder's Field Trip**

Saturday, April 12, 8 AM

Sandy Ridge Reservation

### **Field Trip**

Saturday, April 19, 9 AM

**Augusta-Anne Olsen State Nature Preserve**

The parking lot is one mile north of Wakeman on West River Road. The southern end of West River Road intersects Route 20 at the Shell Station on the west side of Wakeman.

### **Lake Erie Wing Watch**

Saturday, April 12

BGSU Firelands College, Cedar Point Center

8:45 AM – 4:30 PM Exhibitor Tables Open

8:45 – 9:45 AM

Beginning Birds, Part I, Carol Andres  
Warblers, Part I, Jim McCormac  
Sketching Nature: Becoming a Better Birder, Phil Chaon  
Birding Holden Arboretum, Hans Petruschke

10:00 – 11:00 AM

Beginning Birds, Part II, Carol Andres  
Warblers, Part II, Jim McCormac  
Bird Songs for Beginners, Tom Hissong  
Woodpeckers, Andy Jones

11:30 AM – 1:30 PM Lunch and Guest Speaker

**William “Bill” Thompson, III**

**No Child Left Inside:**

**Getting Kids into Birding**

Bill Thompson, III is the editor of *Bird Watcher’s Digest* and the author of numerous books about birds and bird watching. He is a regular keynote speaker and field trip leader on the birding festival circuit. Bill also writes the daily birding blog *Bill of the Birds* and hosts the popular podcast *This Birding Life*. He lives in Whipple, Ohio.

2:00 – 3:00 PM

Purple Martins, Larry Hunter  
Raptor ID, Chris Knoll  
Advanced Bird Songs, Tom Hissong  
Birding Oak Openings, Karen Menard

3:15 -- 4:15 PM

Plumages and Molts, Mark Shieldcastle  
Raptor ID (repeat), Chris Knoll  
Bald Eagles, Joe Margetiak,  
Woodpeckers (repeat), Andy Jones

#### **Admission**

Pre-registration \$35 (lunch included)

On-site registration \$40 (lunch subject to availability)

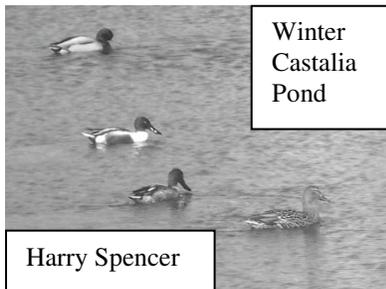
**Information about other events** (Breakfast with the Birds, Off Site Events, Lodging, etc.):

**800-255-3743** or **www.LakeErieWingWatch.com**

## **Castalia and Beyond**

By **Dick Lee**

Our February 16 field trip to Castalia Pond turned into a favorable one because of the beautiful day and the sightings of many birds. About a dozen members



and friends met at Castalia to observe the waterfowl in the waters that are always open even when other areas are frozen. We observed the usual large number of Canada Geese and Mallards, but also a variety of dabblers and a few divers. Gadwall, Redhead, Canvasback and shovelers numbered between a dozen and fifty. Also seen in smaller numbers were the American Wigeon and the beautiful Bufflehead. We saw

two American Black Ducks, one with an antenna attached. It was apparently part of a research

project. One each of the Lesser Scaup and Common Goldeneye were present. A Cooper's Hawk surprised us by flying out from one of the cottonwoods on the bank of the pond.

Paul Sherwood, a naturalist from Sandusky, joined us and led us to some spots where he had observed some species that were not at Castalia. He guided us to a quarry at Rt. 2 and Rt.269 where we observed five Great Blue Herons, two Mute Swans and a Red-tailed Hawk, along with more Canadas and Mallards. Paul then led a caravan into Sandusky to a small open area on Mills Creek. In the trees and shrubs surrounding the open water were **44 Black-crowned Night-Herons**. This was the highlight of our day, but did not keep us from enjoying the pair of Bald Eagles which soared overhead and the Belted Kingfishers rattling along the stream.

Paul then gave us directions to a country road (Maple Ave) between Sandusky and Castalia where we observed Northern Harriers and some winter visitors from our north, Horned Larks and Snow Buntings.

We made our usual lunch stop at Cold Creek Cafe in Castalia, but that didn't end our birding as we saw another Bald Eagle from our dining area.

After lunch we ventured north to Pickerel Creek Wildlife Area where we observed a number of Northern Harriers, redtails, Great Blue Herons, American Tree Sparrows, Song Sparrows, American Goldfinches, another Cooper's Hawk, Tufted Titmouse, Red-bellied Woodpecker, American Crows plus Mourning Doves, Rock Pigeons, Brown-headed Cowbirds, and Blue Jays.

Our total of 34 species for the day made it a great day to be birding during calm, sunny, 30 degree weather in northern Ohio. As this was the weekend for the Great Backyard Bird Count, all of our observations were entered into Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's database. Upon checking the records of observations entered at that time, we noticed that we had the third highest number of Black-crowned Night-Herons in the nation and the only record away from the coasts.



Black-crowned Night-Heron/William Bofinger

## Black Duck Conservation

By **Jack Smith** and **Tammy Martin**

For the second successive year on the Castalia Field Trip, our group observed an American Black Duck with an antenna protruding from its back. We offer the following as the probable explanation of these unusual sightings.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife, has begun a multi-year study to track the movement and habitat of black ducks. Both the Division of Wildlife and Ducks Unlimited are very concerned by the declining number of black ducks breeding, wintering, and staging in the Mississippi Flyway, which includes Ohio. Tracking the black ducks as they winter, travel, and nest may shed some light on whether the population decline can be attributed to changes in habitat, location of breeding and wintering areas, or migratory routes.

The program to investigate the duck behavior is underway and is paid for by ODNR and Ducks Unlimited. The project director is Dave Sherman with an office at Crane Creek, and much of the information that follows comes from a phone call to him.

In 2007 satellite transmitters equipped with Global Positioning System (GPS) location detectors, were installed on three male black ducks near Castalia Pond. All migrated north to Canada. The transmitter on one failed in early July. Another bird summered at James Bay before its transmitter failed in November, and the third duck spent the summer on the shore of Hudson Bay before migrating southward during October. Its transmitter stopped functioning about 200 miles north of Lake Superior.

This year eleven birds have been captured in a walk-in trap located on the shore of Castalia pond, and the birds have been equipped with GPS transmitters. Sherman's team of avian biologists will capture and equip one more black duck this season.

The biologists are particularly interested in studying the migratory patterns of female black ducks because the females and males separate sometime during the spring migration season.

Evidently we observed one of these newly equipped ducks.

## A Birder's Diary

By **Carol L. Leininger**

I am a senior citizen who loves to go birdwatching. But, how did it all begin?

I was in high school when my Biology teacher suggested I take a summer birdwatching class at the Reading Museum.

My girl friend, Pat, and I decided we would ride our bikes to the museum for the classes. My brother and cousin decided to go too. So, EARLY in the morning we rode to the museum taking about an hour as we chose roads less traveled as much as possible. I enjoyed those early morning rides, but not the uphill return trips during the heat of the day. We had a wonderful instructor and learned a lot. I'll never forget the first field trip on the museum grounds. I had my own bird book and binoculars and began my very own life list.

The first bird was heard before we saw it, and we learned to recognize its song – a distinct ee-o-lay. Finally we saw the bird, robin-sized with a rusty head and spots all over its breast and belly, scratching on the ground under some trees.



Wood Thrush  
John Koscinski

My first life bird was a Wood Thrush! I was hooked! I have been birding ever since.

I took ornithology courses in college and eventually taught my own classes on the subject. I am continually learning more about birds.

Wood Thrushes are not as abundant today as they were when I saw my first one. I learned that they eat snails on the forest floor to get calcium for their eggs, and, due to acid rain, snails are not as abundant as they once were.

After he retired I encouraged my father to birdwatch. We would take my nephew, who wasn't in school yet, along with us. When my nephew, PJ, could print words, he sent me his first bird list, which I still cherish.

A warning: Birding can be contagious, whether you are 6 or 60! Nothing beats getting outside with nature. For the sounds of home and work (phones, TVs, computers, etc.), substitute the songs and sights of birds, frogs, wildflowers, interesting fungi, and, yes, even the moon and stars on a clear night.

I dare you to take the plunge and get away from it all. And don't forget to take a friend along.

# Backyard Dining

By **Harriet Alger**

February 27

Yesterday afternoon a Cooper's Hawk put on a five-hour show for me and my next-door neighbors. As I was getting ready to eat lunch, I saw one of the neighborhood Cooper's Hawks sitting on its prey in the backyard. The bird was ripping the prey apart with feathers flying in a circle around it. Occasionally it paused to eat and then sent feathers flying again. The prey was mostly buried in the four-inch deep snow except for the area under the hawk where bloody bits were seized and eaten. The size and color, mainly black and grey and white, of some of the feathers and the size of the mound under the hawk suggested that the victim was either one of the Rock Pigeons or one of the Mourning Doves that frequents the feeders.

I took some pictures through the window and then decided to try my luck outside. The bird only glanced at me briefly as I snapped pictures from several angles.

Throughout the afternoon, I checked on the bird and its meal. My neighbors telephoned me to ask about both the identity of the species and what was the explanation of the show? One wanted to know if a hawk was a danger to their cat. I could only suggest that it was unlikely to be a danger. I did not tell the caller that once I had seen a Cooper's Hawk with a squirrel as captive. For five hours the hawk alternately ate and sat on guard atop its lunch, which became afternoon tea and early supper. With each pause in eating, it sat and looked around, obviously protecting its kill from any intrusion. Finally, at a little after 5 PM, it flew away carrying about an eight-inch thin piece of carcass. By this time the remainder was covered with snow, which had been steadily falling all afternoon. Only a few feather tips and bloody spots were visible. I will wait for a thaw or go out today and brush the snow away to determine the species of the victim.

As a finale, after dark I saw one of the neighborhood cats finishing off some of the remains.



## Stop the Illegal Killing

Thousands of protected raptors such as Cooper's Hawks, Peregrine Falcons, and Red-tailed Hawks are being killed each year by hobbyists who raise pigeons for flying competitions. Currently, killing a protected bird is a Class B Misdemeanor under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which puts suffocating a Peregrine Falcon in the same category as unauthorized use of the image of Smokey Bear. It is time to update the nearly-century-old Migratory Bird Treaty Act to treat illegal killing of protected bird species with the seriousness that these crimes deserve.

**Please ask your U.S. Representative to co-sponsor HR 4093, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act Penalty and Enforcement Act of 2007, to ensure raptors and other migratory birds are given adequate protection.**

*From the National Audubon Society*

## Pro Golfer Kills Hawk

By **Harry Spencer**

On December 12, professional golfer Tripp Isenhour killed a Red-shouldered Hawk whose loud calls were disrupting the filming of an instructional video in Orlando, Florida. He stated recently on a nationally televised **show** that he did not intend to kill the bird. "The bird was high up in the tree, and I was simply just trying to hit the tree to make the bird fly away," he said.

Besides the charge of killing a migratory bird, Isenhour was charged with animal cruelty. Conviction on both charges could result in sentences of 14 months in jail and \$1,500 in fines.

These penalties are so much more serious than that for the Class D Misdemeanor charge for killing a migratory bird discussed in the above Audubon announcement, that I conclude that the additional animal cruelty charge accounts for the preponderance of the penalties. Evidently the penalty for animal cruelty currently is treated legally much more seriously than killing a migratory bird.

*Adapted from articles in the NY Times, Cleveland Plain Dealer, and the Elyria Chronicle Telegram*

## February Sightings

During February, Black River Audubon members identified 59 species during 43 hikes at Black River Reservation, Avon Lake Power Plant, Bacon Woods, Carlisle Reservation, Lorain Harbor, Oberlin Arboretum/Cemetery, and Sandy Ridge Reservation. The 43 checklists filed with eBird represented about one out of eighteen filed in Ohio during February. The species identified are:

Canada Goose, American Black Duck, Mallard, Canvasback, Redhead, Lesser Scaup, White-winged Scoter, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser,

Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, American Coot,

Sandhill Crane, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Great Horned Owl, Belted Kingfisher,

Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker,

Northern Shrike, Blue Jay, American Crow, Horned Lark, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling,

American Tree Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, House Finch, Common Redpoll, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow

## Wildlife Habitat Conserved

President **Harriet Alger** received a copy of the following message:

From: **Western Reserve Land Conservancy (WRLC) Firelands Chapter**

Sent: Thursday, February 14, 2008 2:35 PM

Subject: Firelands Scout Camp update and THANKS!

Friends,

You may have wondered what has been happening with the Heart of Ohio Firelands Boy Scout Camp land preservation project.

As you know, we were successful in acquiring a State of Ohio Clean Ohio grant of \$880,000 in the spring of 2007 to pay for the purchase of the conservation easement for the camp.

Additional matching funds in the amount of \$600,000 were still needed to be raised as a condition of the grant.

This project has been a real roller coaster!

We just wanted to give you an update and share the great news: On January 28, 2008 we received word that \$600,000 in funds from the Federal Government through NOAA were officially approved to be used towards the permanent protection of the Scout camp.

Marcy Kaptur played a huge part in our receiving these funds. If you can, please thank her for her support of this project!

All the best,

**Kate Pilacky and Andy McDowell,**

WRLC Firelands Field office, on behalf of Western Reserve Land Conservancy

## Upside Down Birds

By Jack Smith

At times over the years, I have noted several beginning bird watcher's excited exclamations "Look at that bird running down the trunk of a tree. What is it?" My answer is that it is the Upside Down Bird, a nuthatch.

The genus name for nuthatches is *Sitta*, an adaptation of the Greek word *sitte* used by Aristotle for a bird that pecks at the bark of trees.

This nuthatch habit of running down a tree trunk is unusual. The birds have strong, muscular legs and toes with long and sharp-pointed claws, illustrated in the back cover photo, and which are useful in gripping tree bark. The birds feed upon insects and spiders obtained during their downward journey. During the nesting season this high protein diet is particularly important food for the nestlings.

Nuthatches use their sharp pointed beaks as seed crackers. A familiar sight is that of a nuthatch snatching a seed from a backyard feeder, flying to a tree, inserting the seed into a crevice, and hacking the seed repeatedly until it opens. This hacking process led to its English name. Hatch is a corruption of the word hack.

Nuthatches also cache seeds in tree cracks and crevices to be retrieved at a later date.

### White-breasted Nuthatch

*Sitta carolinensis*



The White-breasted Nuthatch is our only common year-around nuthatch and the larger of the two nuthatches found in our area. Its length is 5 to 6-inches, and its wingspan is 9 ¼ to 11½-inches. Sexes look much alike except that a male has a jet black patch on the top of its head and a female has a somewhat lighter patch.

I guess that the left photo is that of a male.

A reliable way of telling sexes apart is to observe a male feeding its mate during the courting season. A female

also will carry nesting material to a nesting site.

A pair of white-breasted nuthatches remains near the nesting territory throughout the year and the two may remain together for life.

The nesting site in a mature deciduous forest may be an old woodpecker hole or a natural cavity between 15 and 60-feet above ground. Rarely, the birds may excavate a hole in rotten wood.

The female builds the nest, using bark-fibers, grasses, twigs, and hair. One of the pair may rub a crushed insect over both inside and outside the nest. Perhaps some fluids from the insect act as marauder repellents.

The female lays 5 to 9 white eggs with reddish-brown spots and incubates them as her mate brings food. The eggs hatch in 12 to 14-days. Both parents feed the nestlings. The nestlings fledge in 14 to 26 days.

One is the usual number of yearly broods.

In late summer the adults molt completely. In an expanded territory, a pair remains together for the balance of the year.

Upon the onset of cold weather the nuthatch diet broadens from mostly insects to a large portion of seeds, such as beech seeds.

The population of White-breasted Nuthatches currently is stable.

## **Red-breasted Nuthatch**

*Sitta canadensis*

The Red-breasted Nuthatch is an irregular winter visitor to Ohio. A few have been recorded as year-around Ohio residents in areas where fairly extensive native conifers exist or where other conifers have been planted.

The 1991 edition of the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas reported a few confirmed nesting sites in the glaciated plateau of Northeastern Ohio Counties, including one in Findley State Park. Because the extensive pine plantings in that park will be about 25 years more mature, the next Breeding Bird Atlas due in the near future may confirm Findley as a breeding site.

The Red-breasted Nuthatch is a common year-around resident of areas north of us and high in mountainous regions. We are currently enjoying one of the occasional irruptions of this species. The commonly accepted explanation of such an irruption is that the nuthatch's boreal forest food supply runs low for some reason.

Individuals of this species are smaller than White-breasted Nuthatches. They are 4½ to 4¾-inches long with a wing spread of 8 to 8 ½ - inches. They weigh only one-quarter to one-third ounces.

In the courtship display of this species, a male turns his back to the female, raised his head, drops his wings, and sways from side to side. The male also feeds the female.

After nesting-site selection, usually in a rotten stub or snag, both male and female excavate a cavity 5 to 40 feet above ground. The female, however, builds the nest out of soft grass, moss, bark-fibers, and feathers. Sticky pitch is smeared around the entrance, perhaps for the purpose of deterring other creatures from entering the nest. To avoid getting stuck in this pitch, the adult birds fly directly into the nest.

The female lays 5 to 6 white eggs with reddish-brown spots. She incubates her eggs as



the male brings food. After about 12 days the eggs hatch. Both parents feed the hatchlings. Two or three weeks later, the young fledge.

A pair raises only a single brood each year.

The population of Red-breasted Nuthatches is stable overall, although their numbers are increasing southward in eastern North America in areas in which increasing numbers of coniferous tree are being planted.

**References:** *Lives of North American Birds*, Kenn Kaufman; *Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds*, John K. Terres; *Birds of Ohio*, Bruce G. Peterjohn; *Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas*, Bruce G. Peterjohn and Daniel L. Rice; *Guide to Bird Behavior*, Volume Two, Donald and Lillian Stokes.